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Russians Make Missile Advances, Unveil New Generation Of Arms

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WASHINGTON — Russia

appears to be well on the way to erasing whatever lead the United States holds in long-range missiles.

In the past few months, and more recently on May 9, they have unveiled an entire new "generation" of four solid-fueled ICBMs that compare with this country's Minuteman and submarine-launched Polaris missiles.

Moreover, they have come up with a new solid-fueled mobile medium-range (about 1,200 miles) missile — something the U.S. can't match. This weapon, nicknamed the "Iron Maiden," is a considerable advance over the cumbersome liquid-fueled Sandal missiles that were deployed in Cuba.

Unit Mobile

The "Iron Maiden" is carried on a tracked transporter that also acts as a launcher. It is entirely mobile. The Sandals needed large bases, on the other hand, and it was through the scraping of dirt for launch sites that the Soviet-Cuba operation was spotted in time to halt it.

No such telltale evidence will be available to snooping reconnaissance planes should the Russians decide to ship the new missile to Cuba.

This is but one of several worries now surfacing in the wake of what seems to be a major transition in the shape of the Soviet strategic striking force. It could well force some major changes

in U.S. armaments and, if it hasn't already, initiate a new "escalation" in the arms race.

It is the contention of most informed observers here that the Soviets never parade a new rocket or missile until long after it has gone into service, possibly as much as two or three years. This would allow plenty of time for a substantial buildup.

But there is a large area of doubt here. Neither Russian nor U.S. intelligence is giving out any production and deployment figures.

The "missile gap" of the 1960 election campaign was based upon prior estimates of the number of big liquid-fueled ICBMs the Russians could produce. Once the Kennedy administration took office, however, the intelligence estimates were revised. Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara let it be known that the Soviets had not built very many ICBMs and, very shortly, it was claimed that the "missile gap" was in favor of the U.S.

At the time, there was conjecture that the Russians had dropped the hard-to-maintain liquid rockets in favor of easy-to-launch solid-fueled missiles. It now appears this is precisely what happened.

In this connection, it is perhaps timely to recall that back in 1960 Adm. William F. Raborn contended on several occasions the Polaris missile was about five years ahead of Russia. Raborn was then boss of the Polaris program.

Today, five years later, he is head of the Central Intelligence Agency. And the Russians are parading two solid-fueled missiles which they say are designed to be launched from atom-powered submarines.

Raborn is in an interesting position to check on the accuracy of his forecast.

The Soviet switch to land-based solid-fueled ICBMs, about to be launched from an underground silo that also protects them, presents a new complication for the Pentagon planners playing war "games." Those missiles will be much harder to knock out in the event of an all-out conflict. It will take more U.S. missiles to do the job.

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This brings up the question whether enough Minuteman and Polaris missiles are being built. The planned total is 1,000 Minutemen and 656 Polaris, the latter aboard 41 submarines.

Last year, McNamara killed a plan to add 20 more Minutemen to the force. He said they weren't needed in view of current development of the more deadly Minuteman II.

Just two weeks ago, however, the secretary had a change of mind about what was needed to fight the war in Viet Nam. The administration is now asking another \$700 million for planes and ammunition.

It will be interesting to see if the new evidence of Soviet ICBM muscle forces another change in thinking.